

'DIRTIEST' CAMPAIGN LAID TO CHURCH FOES: Senator Accuses ...

By WAYNE KING Special to The New York Times
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'DIRTIEST' CAMPAIGN LAID TO CHURCH FOES

Senator Accuses Conservatives of
Low Blows as His Challenger
Raises the 'C.I.A. Stuff'

By WAYNE KING
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BOISE, Idaho, Oct. 24 — It was a classic instance of the time-tested, if not particularly time-honored, technique of planting a political question intended to embarrass one's opponent.

Campaigning earlier this month in the town of Grangeville in northern Idaho, Steven D. Symms, 42 years old, a handsome, affable four-term Republican Congressman fighting hard to wrest away the United States Senate seat held for 24 years by Frank Church, sidled up to a supporter and asked for his help.

"Hey, if they open this up for questions, ask that question in front of these TV guys," he said, referring to an inquiry on the Central Intelligence Agency. The campaign tour was being filmed by an ABC News crew, and the exchange was recorded by a wireless microphone that Mr. Symms had neglected to turn off.

And the Question Is Asked

The supporter complied by asking whether investigations of the C.I.A. by the Senate Intelligence Committee, headed by Senator Church, in the mid-70's had weakened it. Mr. Symms, giving

The Race for Congress

no hint he had expected the question, referred it to Senator James A. McClure, who was campaigning with him.

On cue, Mr. McClure replied that he had spoken with Richard S. Welch, the agency's station chief in Greece at the time of the investigations, and that Mr. Welch had told him that Mr. Church was "going to get some of our people killed" and "two weeks later that man was dead ... assassinated."

John Wilson, a campaign aide, conceded that Mr. Symms had planted the question — "He should have turned the mike off," he said — but he defended the incident by saying that "there has been so much C.I.A. stuff that the local press has ignored."

Mr. Church, 56, a liberal Democrat, who has been under a heavy barrage from the Virginia-based National Conservative Political Action Committee and other conservative groups, takes a different view.

'Absolutely Villainous Attack'

"This is absolutely a villainous attack," he said. "I had an understanding that my committee never asked for and never obtained the identity of any agent overseas. We didn't even have the information. To try to implicate me in the death of Welch is a new low in politics."

Mr. Church is one of six Senators "targeted" for defeat by the conservative coalition. The others are Alan Cranston of California, George McGovern of South Dakota, Birch Bayh of Indiana, John C. Culver of Iowa and Thomas F. Eagleton of Missouri. Mr. Church and Mr. McGovern are the main targets, because of their prominence and the perception of their states as fundamentally conservative.

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The New York Times / David R. Frazier

Senator Frank Church, right, Democrat, debating in Boise with his Republican foe, Representative Steven D. Symms

The coalition, when it spends money to defeat rather than support candidates, is under no legal limit proscribed by the campaign contribution laws. Here, it has spent \$219,000 on a campaign of television and other advertising intended to paint, often with less than bull's-eye accuracy, the four-term Mr. Church as too liberal for his constituency.

A television spot filmed in front of an empty missile silo and accusing Mr. Church of having "almost always opposed a strong national defense" proved an embarrassment when it was noted that the silo was empty because the Titan missile it had contained had been superseded by the Minuteman. The committee also bought newspaper advertisements accusing Mr. Church of voting to increase his Senate salary, then bought other advertisements to admit that he had in fact voted against the increase.

Other advertisements portray him as being chummy with President Fidel Castro of Cuba, pandering to what the spots refer to as "Zionism," peddling his influence and promoting abortion, which he in fact opposes except for medical reasons or in cases of rape.

Termed 'Dirtiest Campaign'

"It's the dirtiest campaign in Idaho history," Mr. Church, who has spent more than \$1 million on his campaign, said in an interview last night after a largely gentlemanly, issue-oriented debate with Mr. Symms. "They know I will rebut these things, but they also know that it takes a long time for the truth to catch up with the charge."

Meanwhile, Mr. Symms, who disavows any connection with the tactics of the conservative coalition, has had troubles of his own. After he won an endorsement from a loggers' union by saying he was opposed to right-to-work laws, it was disclosed that he had co-sponsored a right-to-work bill in the House. A spokesman said this week simply that he had

"changed his mind."

There have also been allegations, notably by the columnist Jack Anderson, that Mr. Symms is a tool for Nelson Bunker Hunt, the so-called silver king, who is on his campaign finance committee, and that he sought to influence silver prices through legislation while Mr. Hunt and his brother were investing heavily in the silver market — and while Mr. Symms was making some personal silver investments of his own.

The Symms spokesman termed the al-

legations "a distortion" and said Mr. Symms, as a representative of the largest silver-producing state, had long advocated "strategic stockpiling" of silver by the Government.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the battling on both sides, the race is regarded as even. A poll published Oct. 19 by The Idaho Statesman gave Mr. Church 42.9 percent and Mr. Symms 40.6 percent, almost the same percentages found in a similar poll released Sept. 28.